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BASIC LITERACY PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS--A NATIONAL SURVEY.

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BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS IN 36 STATES WERE SURVEYED IN THE SPRING OF 1966 TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT LOCATION, LENGTH OF TIME OF OPERATION, PRIOR EDUCATION AND SEX OF ENROLLEES, LEVEL OF INSTRUCTION PROVIDED, TOTAL ENROLLMENT, AND MATERIALS USED. DATA FROM A TWO-PAGE QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED BY THE DIRECTORS OF 367 LOCAL PROGRAMS (A 71 PERCENT RETURN) WERE ANALYZED ACCORDING TO THE AGE OF PROGRAMS TO DETERMINE IF OLDER PROGRAMS, ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE TITLE IIB FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE, HAD CHARACTERISTICS WHICH DIFFERED FROM THE MORE RECENTLY DEVELOPED PROGRAMS. RESULTS OF THE DATA, PRESENTED IN TABULAR FORM, ARE DISCUSSED AND INTERPRETED, AND TRENDS ARE NOTED. ADDITIONAL STUDY OF THE FOLLOWING IS RECOMMENDED--THE GROWTH RATE OF NEWLY ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS, THE TREND TOWARD MORE MEN IN THE LITERACY PROGRAMS, THE LACK OF INSTRUCTION FOR ILLITERATES OFFERED IN THE VARIOUS PROGRAMS, AND THE TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF MATERIALS PRIMARILY DESIGNED FOR ADULTS. FIVE TABLES ARE INCLUDED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE (SAINT PETERSBURG, DECEMBER 1-3, 1966). (LS)

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Basic Literacy Programs for Adults: A National Survey[1,2]

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In the early spring of 1966 we began a critical evaluation of materials available for teaching basic reading to illiterate and marginally literate adults. The present survey was begun when we decided that it would be useful to know more about the programs in which such materials were being used. We set out first to find

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[2]A paper read at the National Reading Conference annual meeting, St. Petersburg, Florida, December 1-3, 1966.

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out what was being done at the state level, but it soon became apparent that specific information could be obtained only from direct contact with local programs. The purpose, then, was to obtain specific information about basic education programs for adults, and the end result was this survey of selected local programs in 36 states.

Procedure

Letters of inquiry regarding adult basic education programs were sent to state directors of adult education in all 50 states. Local programs were selected from lists provided by state directors who responded. Total responses to questionnaires sent to selected local programs are given by state in Table 1.

Responses are not from a systematically chosen sample of programs; but, instead, they are responses from states and from local programs that had Title IIb programs underway and that chose to respond to our questionnaires. This, of course, limits the generality of the data. But, in defense of the method, it must be pointed out that during a time when new programs are being instigated each day even a systematic sampling with forced responses would have carried similar limitations. Also, the percentage of responses to questionnaires to local programs was high, approximately 71 percent.

Perhaps the reason for the high response rate was the brevity of the questionnaire. The form comprised less than two pages and, in general, responses to items were simply check marks or two or three word statements. We sought the following information:

T A B L E 1

Program Sampled by State

State	Number of Respondents	State	Number of Respondents
Arizona	13	Nebraska	3
Arkansas	17	Nevada	7
California	14	New Hampshire	6
Colorado	9	New Jersey	10
Connecticut	14	New Mexico	8
Florida	9	New York	22
Georgia	7	North Carolina	23
Hawaii	5	Oklahoma	4
Illinois	11	Oregon	14
Iowa	12	Pennsylvania	19
Kansas	7	Rhode Island	8
Kentucky	15	Tennessee	8
Maine	12	Utah	5
Maryland	14	Virginia	7
Massachusetts	8	Washington	11
Michigan	11	West Virginia	9
Minnesota	3	Wisconsin	4
Missouri	14	Wyoming	4
Total Programs Sampled = 367			

location of the program, length of time the program had been in operation, prior education and sex of enrollees, level of instruction provided, total enrollment and materials used.

All results were in by June, 1966. The data, then, provide descriptive information regarding 367 adult basic education programs in 36 states in the spring of 1966. Modesty and reality prohibit grandiose claims, but the results are interesting and, we hope, worth noting.

Results and Discussion

Results of the survey are summarized in a series of tables. Grand totals given in the tables are not always equal because they reflect total respondents to specific items on the questionnaire. Respondents did not always give information in regard to each item. We thought that older, established programs might have certain characteristics that would set them apart from more recently developed programs; therefore, we sought information that would enable us to categorize programs by age. We assumed that programs that had been in operation for more than two years prior to June, 1966, had been established before the current impetus for adult basic education programs and that programs less than a year old may have been established in response to current federal legislation. Information regarding program age is given in several contexts.

Background information on adult students in programs categorized by age is given in Table 2. Respondents were free to check more than one description of their students, and this fact is reflected in the totals by rows. No gross difference in

TABLE 2

Enrollee Background By Age of Program

Enrollee Background	Age of Program: More than two years	More than one but less than two years	More than six months but less than one year	Established less than six months prior to completion of survey (June, 1966)	Total responses in each category[a]
Mainly immigrants	14(.20)[b]	9(.17)	12(.10)	16(.13)	51(.14)
Some immigrants	30(.43)	13(.25)	31(.28)	36(.29)	110(.30)
Mainly dropouts after age 16	21(.30)	14(.27)	41(.35)	36(.29)	112(.31)
Some dropouts after age 16	18(.26)	19(.37)	22(.19)	62(.50)	121(.33)
Mainly dropouts before age 16	28(.40)	22(.42)	56(.48)	21(.17)	127(.35)
Some dropouts before age 16	12(.17)	9(.17)	14(.12)	-	35(.10)
Others	2	-	-	-	2
Total Programs Reporting	69	42	117	124	

[a]A single program may have reported in more than one category

[b]Percentage in parentheses

student composition of programs of different ages are apparent. However, two trends can be seen. First, fewer of the newer programs report immigrants in their student bodies. Second, there seems to be a trend toward fewer dropouts before the age of sixteen in the newest programs. Possible reasons for both trends are apparent: the reeruitment appeal of newly established programs is not generally to the non-English speaking adult, but rather to the marginally literate adult; and compulsory school attendance laws limit the supply of dropouts before the age of sixteen. One other point is made in Table 2: about two-thirds of the programs surveyed were established within the past year.

The average enrollments and the sex of enrollees are given by program age in Table 3. As shown in Table 2, about two-thirds of the programs surveyed were established within a year of the survey; and the data in Table 3 show that the new programs are still relatively small. Whereas the average program over two years old enrolls an average of 410 students, the average enrollment in the newer categories is 245 and 74. Furthermore, there is a distinct trend for the newer programs to include more men. The impact of recent federal legislation and funding is, of course, obvious .

It is heartening to see that more men are being recruited by basic education programs. The most immediately apparent economic payoff of basic education programs is likely to come as there men become employable. This is not, however, to belittle the contribution better educated women can make. The

TABLE 3

Program Size and Sex of Enrollees by Age of Program

Age of Program	Sex	Program Data: Number of Enrollees	Percentage by sex	Average number of enrolleas in a program by sex
All programs		92,383 (361)		
	male	42,236	.458	117
	female	50,147	.542	139
				256
Over 2 years old		27,912 (68)		
	male	10,603	.38	156
	female	17,309	.62	254
				410
Less than 2 but more than 1 year old		20,075 (51)		
	male	9,063	.45	177
	female	11,012	.55	216
				393
More than 6 months but less than 1 year old		27,956 (114)		
	male	14,056	.502	123
	female	13,900	.497	122
				245
Less than 6 months old		9,320 (125)		
	male	4,758	.51	38
	female	4,563	.49	36
				74
No date of establishment given		170 (3)		
	male	85		
	female	85		

payoff may be delayed as much as a generation, but the effects may be more sweeping. For now, the fact that men are coming into the new programs seems to be a good indicator of success in overcoming men's reluctance to go back to school. The war on poverty probably has a more masculine appeal than have many previous efforts; and the fact that many new programs are housed in other than traditional school settings undoubtedly helps men to overcome their reluctance to return to school.

Level of instruction provided is shown by age of program in Table 4. It seems clear that few programs of any age are providing instruction for illiterates. This may reflect the fact that there are relatively few completely illiterate adults outside of institutions; or it may be indicative of inability to work with illiterates or lack of success in recruiting them. Perhaps the explanation includes aspects of each. On the other hand, few of the respondents claim to be offering instruction at beyond the sixth grade level. This demonstrates our success in reaching the programs we hoped to reach. The trend for fewer new programs to offer basic level (grade one through three equivalent) reading instruction and for more of the newer programs to offer instruction at the intermediate (grade four through six) level is interesting. But again, whether this reflects the difficulty of offering basic instruction, recruitment idiosyncrasies or level of more urgent need is not clear. Of course, an entirely different hypothesis can also be suggested: perhaps the marginally literate young adults coming into new programs are generally able to read at

TABLE 4

Level of Instruction Provided By Age of Program

Reading Level	Age of Programs				Total Responses by reading level
	Over two years	More than one but less than two years	More than six months but less than one year	Less than Six months	
Illiterate	1(.01)[a]	1(.02)	1(>.01)	5(.04)	8 (.02)
ist - 3rd grade	44(.65)	31(.58)	61(.54)	49(.39)	186[b](.51)
4th - 6th grade	22(.33)	21(.40)	51(.45)	70(.56)	166[c](.46)
Above 6th grade	1(.01)	0	0	1(>.01)	2 (>.01)
Total Programs Reporting	68(.19)	53(.15)	113(.30)	125(.35)	

[a]Percentage in parentheses

[b]Includes one program not reporting date of establishment.

[c]Includes two programs not reporting date of establishment.

better than beginning levels. This might be expected on the grounds that schools are making greater efforts both to retain students and to provide remedial help for those with learning problems.

The final item on each questionnaire asked for information regarding teaching materials. The publishers most frequently mentioned are given in Table 5. It was not possible to tell which specific materials were used if a publisher has several instructional programs to offer. It is clear, however, that certain publishers supply a substantial portion of the materials used. Many other publishers were listed, but not by an appreciable number of respondents. A fairly large number of programs, 45 or 13 percent, reported using teacher-made materials, and a substantial number admitted to using materials prepared for children. Of course both teacher-made and children's material can be useful in adult literacy programs if they are carefully chosen and adapted to specific needs; on the other hand, the use of either might simply be indicative of lack of funds, realism or information. More explicit study of materials actually used in programs of various types will be worthwhile.

Implications

The value of this survey seems to lie more in its implications for further study than in its conclusive results. While it is interesting to note certain trends, the general effect is to raise questions as to why the trends were demonstrated. At this point, then, it seems appropriate to

T A B L E 5

Publishers of Materials, By Level,
Used in Substantial Numbers of Programs.

	Publisher	Total and Percent Time Mentioned
Materials designed for adult basic education	Steck-Vaughn	148(.41)
	Follett	143(.39)
	Reader's Digest	133(.36)
	Allied Ed. Council	114(.31)
	Laubach	72(.20)
	Holt	48(.13)
	Teacher-made	45(.13)
Materials designed for children	SRA	101(.27)
	McGraw-Hill	22(.06)
	Educational Development Laboratories	18(.05)

enumerate some questions to which answers might profitably be sought. The proposed questions are illustrative; the list is not exhaustive.

1. What will be the growth rate of newly established programs? As noted, the newer programs have smaller enrollments than the established programs. It would be interesting to follow the growth rates of programs in different geographic areas, with different recruiting procedures, with different teaching procedures, at different instructional levels, etc. to see which of them are sustained, which grow rapidly, and which flounder. This kind of information would provide useful feedback for planning future programs and program emphases.

2. Specifically, what accounts for the trend toward more men in the literacy programs? Or, is the trend due to the effect of relatively few programs? Answers would be useful in planning recruitment procedures to attract men to literacy programs.

3. Why do so few programs claim to offer instruction for illiterates? Why do the new programs offer more intermediate instruction while the older programs offer more beginning level instruction? It would be useful to know whether the reason reflects demand or limitations of the programs. If beginning instruction is not being offered because to offer it is difficult, then corrective steps are needed.

4. What actual use is being made of materials that were designed primarily for adults? What is the nature of the teacher-made materials that are being used? How well informed

are local personnel regarding the current availability of instructional materials for use in adult literacy programs? Answers to these and related questions would be useful because there would be implications for the dissemination of information from state or federal agencies to local program personnel.